

4.2 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

4.2.1 SETTING

The project area encompasses a number of land uses in 15 counties within the State of California, including agricultural and cattle grazing lands. Some of the project area is designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, or Grazing Land. **Table 4.2-1** defines the criteria set by the California Department of Conservation's Division of Land Resource Protection for each of these categories known as Important Farmland Categories) as part of their Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP).

**TABLE 4.2-1
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION,
DIVISION OF LAND RESOURCES IMPORTANT FARMLAND CATEGORIES**

Important Farmland Category	Criteria
Prime Farmland	Farmland with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain long term production of agricultural crops. This land has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields. Land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
Farmland of Statewide Importance	Farmland similar to Prime Farmland but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to store soil moisture. Land must have been used for production of irrigated crops at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
Unique Farmland	Farmland of lesser quality soils used for the production of the state's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include nonirrigated orchards or vineyards as found in some climatic zones in California. Land must have been cropped at some time during the four years prior to the mapping date.
Farmland of Local Importance	Land of importance to the local agricultural economy as determined by each county's board of supervisors and a local advisory committee.
Grazing Land	Land on which the existing vegetation is suited to the grazing of livestock. This category was developed in cooperation with the California Cattlemen's Association, University of California Cooperative Extension, and other groups interested in the extent of grazing activities. The minimum mapping unit for Grazing Land is 40 acres.

Additionally some parcels are held in accordance with the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly referred to as the Williamson Act. The majority of the project area is located within urbanized metropolitan areas, while some portions such as Imperial and parts of San Diego

counties are comprised of mostly agricultural lands. The most direct regulation of land use and development in the project area is provided by city and county governments. Other levels of government, such as regional, state, and federal, also participate in various ways in land use regulation and planning for the project area. This section will discuss only portions of the project area that involve agricultural resources.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY

Sacramento County is centrally located in the 400-mile long Central Valley, which is California's prime agricultural region. The leading agricultural crops include milk, wine grapes, Bartlett pears, field corn, and turkeys. The County is bordered by Contra Costa and San Joaquin Counties on the south, Amador and El Dorado Counties on the east, Placer and Sutter Counties on the north, and Yolo and Solano Counties on the west. Sacramento County extends from the low delta lands between the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers north to about ten miles beyond the state capitol and east to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada. The southernmost portion of Sacramento County has direct access to the San Francisco Bay.

The Sacramento County portion of the project area in its entirety includes areas that are designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Farmland of Local Importance. A large majority of Sacramento County, however, is fully developed and urbanized.

MARIN COUNTY

Although Marin County is commonly characterized as a suburban residential and recreational area, ranching and dairying are major features of the rural areas of West Marin. Approximately 167,000 acres in Marin are farms or ranches, which amounts to 50 percent of the land. Of the 276 agricultural operations in Marin, 72 are considered large and 204 are considered small or mini-farms. The average size of a farm in Marin is 588 acres, and the majority are third- and fourth-generation family owned operations.

Livestock production is the second largest agriculture industry in the county, with 159 beef cattle, cow/calf, and sheep grazing operations producing livestock, replacement heifers for dairies and breeding stock. While milk and livestock products dominate Marin's agricultural activities, a growing number of small truck farm operations (26) produce organic vegetables on 396 acres for Bay Area restaurants and farmer's markets.

In Marin County, the project area encompasses predominantly urbanized areas of the County. It also includes areas designated as Grazing Land, Farmland of Local Importance, and a small portion as Prime Farmland.

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

The County of Contra Costa is the ninth most populous county in California, with its population reaching approximately 930,000 as of January 1, 2000. The County has one of the fastest growing

work forces among Bay Area counties, with growth in its employment base being driven primarily by the need to provide services to an increasing local population. In addition to a growing population and employment, agriculture has an important role in the economy of the County. The top five crops, by value in Contra Costa County are bedding plants, apples, milk, tomatoes, and sweet corn.

The project, although predominantly urbanized in Contra Costa County, includes areas designated as Grazing Land, Farmland of Local Importance, and a small portion as Prime Farmland.

ALAMEDA COUNTY

Geographically, Alameda County is located on the east side of San Francisco Bay and extends from Berkeley and Albany in the north to Fremont in the south. Most of the County's population is concentrated in the narrow area between the East Bay Hills and the Bay. East of the East Bay Hills is the greater Livermore Valley area which has been largely residential and suburban in character, but is rapidly urbanizing. Alameda County encompasses a land area of 737.5 square miles, is bounded on the north by Contra Costa County, on the South by Santa Clara County, on the South East corner by Stanislaus County, on the east by San Joaquin County and on the west by the San Francisco Bay.

In Alameda County, the project area encompasses predominantly urbanized areas of this County. A small portion of the project boundary including areas designated as Grazing Land and Prime Farmland.

SAN MATEO COUNTY

San Mateo County is located south of San Francisco, west of San Jose, and north of San Jose. The County boundaries are comprised of almost all developed areas with surrounding Grazing Land and parcels of Prime Farmland. The majority of Sempra Communications' project boundary includes areas designated as developed. There are scattered parcels of Prime Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

The County of Santa Clara, also referred to as Silicon Valley, is the largest county in the San Francisco Bay Area, with 1,312 square miles populated by approximately 1.7 million residents in fifteen cities, including San Jose and unincorporated areas. While a significant portion of the County's land area is unincorporated ranch and forestland, 92% of the population lives in cities.

In Santa Clara County, the project area includes areas designated as Grazing Land, Prime Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance. Areas in the northern and western portion of the project boundary are concentrated with Grazed Lands. The majority of Prime Farmland is found in the northern portion of the project area boundary.

FRESNO COUNTY

The city and county of Fresno is located in the central San Joaquin Valley of California. To the west it is predominantly flat, with thousands of acres devoted to agriculture. To the east, the snow-capped Sierra Nevada Mountains rise out of the low foothills. Agriculture is a major industry in Fresno County and is a driving force in the County's economy. The top ten crops grown in the County are: grapes, poultry, cotton, tomatoes, milk, cattle and calves, almonds, head lettuce, plums and peaches.

In Fresno County, the project area focuses on the developed areas of Fresno County. Less than ¼ of the project area includes Prime Farmland and along the fringes of the boundary. Surrounding the project area, high concentrations of Prime Farmland, Grazing Land, and Unique Farmland exist.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Los Angeles County remains one of the nation's largest counties with 4,081 square miles, an area some 800 square miles larger than the combined area of the states of Delaware and Rhode Island. The County includes the islands of San Clemente and Santa Catalina. It is bordered on the east by Orange and San Bernardino Counties, on the north by Kern County, on the west by Ventura County, and on the south by the Pacific Ocean. Its coastline is 81 miles long. More than 65% of the County is unincorporated and there are 88 cities within the County.

In Los Angeles County, the project area encompasses primarily urbanized areas and Grazing Land, as well as, scattered Prime Farmland and Farmland of Local Importance in the northwestern portion.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY

Riverside County is the fourth largest county in the state, stretching nearly 200 miles across and comprising over 7,200 square miles of fertile river valleys, low deserts, mountains, foothills and rolling plains. Riverside County shares borders with densely populated Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, and San Bernardino Counties. Livestock and poultry are the top agriculture products in the County.

In Riverside County, the project area encompasses areas designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Farmland of Statewide Importance, plus developed areas as well.

ORANGE COUNTY

Orange County is supported mainly by an agricultural community and has developed into a largely developed area due to urban growth. Major crops growing in the County include oranges, apricots, and walnuts. Also considered important crops are peaches, apples, sugar beets, beans, alfalfa, olives, potatoes, and peppers.

In Orange County, the project area encompasses land designated as Prime Farmland and Grazed Land. The majority of the area is developed.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

At the southern extreme of southern California is San Diego County. The City of San Diego boasts 4,200 square miles of country, which encompasses the metropolitan city itself. Agriculture makes up a significant business sector in San Diego County with an agricultural economy that ranks as the seventh largest among all California counties.

In San Diego County, the project area encompasses areas designated as: Grazing Land, Farmland of Local Importance, and Prime Farmland. The majority of the area is developed area with the agricultural areas scattered throughout on the fringes of the County.

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

San Bernardino County is centrally located Southern California and has developed into a highly urbanized community. The top ten agricultural products for San Bernardino County are milk, cattle and calves, eggs, nursery products, alfalfa, oranges, oriental vegetables, grapes, chickens, meat, and strawberries. Of those products, the top five are milk, cattle and calves, eggs, nursery products, and oranges.

In San Bernardino County, the project area encompasses land designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Local Importance, and Farmland of Statewide Importance. These areas are located primarily on the out skirts of the boundary, with the majority designated as developed.

IMPERIAL COUNTY

Imperial County is located near the Mexican and Arizona borders in Southern California. Leading crops in the area in 1999 are vegetables, livestock, fruit and nuts, seed and nursery, and apiary products. Alfalfa is the number one agronomic crop and the majority of the alfalfa is baled for shipment to California dairies. This is the largest alfalfa-growing region in the world.

The project area for this County, land designated as Prime Farmland is the main component. Scattered within this area is also Farmland of Local Importance and urbanized areas.

4.2.2 REGULATORY SETTING

CALIFORNIA LAND CONSERVATION ACT

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly referred to as the Williamson Act, enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural and open space lands use.

The Land Conservation Act recognizes the importance of agricultural land as an economic resource which is vital to the general welfare of society. The enacting legislation declares that the preservation of a maximum amount of the limited supply of agricultural land is necessary to the conservation of the State's economic resources, and is necessary not only to the maintenance of the agricultural economy of the State, but also for the assurance of adequate, healthful and nutritious food for future residents of California and the nation.

WILLIAMSON ACT

The Williamson Act is a means to restrict the uses of agricultural and open space lands to farming and ranching uses during the length of the contract period. The Williamson Act Program was also envisioned as a way for local governments to integrate the protection of open space and agricultural resources into their overall strategies for planning urban growth patterns.

FARMLAND MAPPING AND MONITORING PROGRAM

The California Department of Conservation, under the Division of Land Resource Protection, has set up the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), which monitors the conversion of the State's farmland to and from agricultural use. The map series identifies eight classifications and uses a minimum mapping unit size of ten acres. The program also produces a biannual report on the amount of land converted from agricultural to non-agricultural use. The program maintains an inventory of state agricultural land and updates its "important Farmland Series Maps" every two years. The FMMP is an informational service only and does not constitute state regulation of local land use decisions. Four categories of farmland, Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance, are considered valuable and any conversion of land within these categories is typically considered to be an adverse impact. See **Table 4.2-1** for the designation criteria for these categories.

4.2.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

APPLICABLE LAND USE DESIGNATIONS, GOALS, AND POLICIES

The project will take place in counties and cities that have adopted and amended goals and policies that pertain to land uses. One of those land use designations is agricultural land. Subsequent actions shall identify the goals and policies of the county and city in which the project actions will take place.

Listed below are a few goals and policies commonly found under sections pertaining to farmland and agricultural resources protection that may be applicable to the proposed project and its subsequent activities:

- Goals and policies are developed to protect important farmlands from conservation and encroachment and conserve agricultural resources.

- Common policies state that the County shall protect prime farmlands with intensive agricultural investments from urban encroachment and mitigate the loss of prime farmlands or lands with intensive agricultural investments through CEQA requirements to provide in-kind protection of nearby farmland.
- In addition, each county and city will have specific goals and policies found in their general plans and zoning ordinances which includes development standards, addresses building locations, and identify allowed land uses.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

The following significance criterion assesses the magnitude of the expected impacts to present agricultural land use designations. A project would normally have a significant effect on the environment if it were to:

- convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the FMMP of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
- impair the agricultural productivity of productive agricultural land;
- conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; or
- involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result on conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural uses.

Project Construction would result in a significant impact if it would:

- result in substantial nuisance effects on sensitive land uses that would disrupt use over an extended period of time.

Project Operation would result in a significant impact if it would:

- impair agricultural productivity or use of neighboring areas.

Impact AGR-1: Inconsistency with applicable land use designations and policies. (Potentially Significant)

Installation of fiber optic cable facilities may result in short-term impacts to agricultural resources or lands. Subsequent activities would likely take place within utility rights-of-way and existing dirt access roads that are maintained by the local area farmers. These activities may extend across existing agricultural areas/fields. There is potential for construction operations to require the removal of existing crop resources such as orchard trees, vines, etc. This potential loss of existing resources would be considered a potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measure AGR-1a: The proposed project consistency shall adhere to each county and city ordinance and policy, and be consistent with project area specific goals, policies, and zoning ordinances.

Prior to implementation of subsequent activities, confirm local and county goals, policies, zoning ordinances, and land designations with respect to agricultural land uses for the project areas as specific routes are designated.

Mitigation Measure AGR-1b: Sempra Communications' shall consult with all potentially affected landowners associated with installation of fiber optic cable facilities in portions of the project area that crosses farmland as part of the right of way use or land acquisition process.

As part of the right of way use or land acquisition process, Sempra Communications' and the land or right of way owners shall negotiate an agreed-upon compensation for the loss of any existing agricultural resources (i.e. orchard trees and/or vines) currently in production.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant

Impact AGR.2: Conduit and associated facility installation could result in temporary disruption of agricultural lands. (Potentially Significant)

Although fiber optic cable installation is proposed primarily in utility rights-of-way, access roads, and other such designated corridors, potential to impact daily agricultural production activities to a significant level does exist.

The project area designated as Agricultural Lands would be disrupted by subsequent activities on a short-term basis only during construction. During construction, access roads will not block workers and farmers from obtaining access to and from the property. In the long-term, areas will be protected and maintained as areas of agricultural lands.

Mitigation Measure AGR-2a: Notify landowners of impending work and restore work site to pre-project conditions.

To ensure that potential short-term impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level, Sempra Communications would notify landowners of impending work and restore work sites to pre-project conditions. In addition, the Sempra Communications' contractors would restore disturbed areas to their pre-project condition, to the extent possible with subsequent project actions, so that short-term construction disturbance does not result in long-term impacts.

Sempra Communications' contractors may not conduct construction activities that impede property owners or agricultural operations workers access to the property, thus inhibiting daily agricultural operations.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant

REFERENCES – Agricultural Resources

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